

Ray's Brother Denies King Plot

WASHINGTON (UPI)—John Ray took the stand in the House Assassinations Committee review of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination and denied he helped free brother James Earl from prison in an alleged family plot to kill the civil rights leader.

But he told the committee he once applauded the death of King.

John Ray, who was arrested Monday in St. Louis on trespass and assault charges, entered the House hearing room Friday escorted by a half-dozen United States marshals. Ray's lawyer, John

Lasar, said his client was arrested after "wandering into a house by mistake."

The committee wants to determine if John and Jerry Ray, brothers of King's convicted assassin, James Earl Ray, were involved in a "family conspiracy" to kill the black leader. Committee counsel Mark Speiser asked John Ray about a letter he was alleged to have written to author William Bradford Huie.

In it, he said of the King assassination, "What's all the excitement about? he only killed a nigger. King should have been killed 10 years ago."

Asked if he still feels that way, Ray

replied, "I'd say no . . . I was living in a racial neighborhood . . . I made a statement . . . I got drunk. It's possible I made that statement."

Committee chairman Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) asked John if his brothers felt that way—a question that sparked a bitter exchange between Lasar and Stokes.

Stokes threatened the Washington lawyer with contempt of Congress and expulsion from the hearing.

Lasar protested, "You have not let me get a word in."

Stokes, angered, replied, "You are a disgrace."

Bristling, Lasar asked Stokes to step outside and repeat what he said without congressional immunity.

At that point, Stokes said he would surrender the chair and temporarily turn it over to Walter Fauntroy, the congressional delegate from the District of Columbia who chairs the subcommittee handling the King case.

"That doesn't answer my question," Lasar persisted, and asked for a recess. Fauntroy then ordered a five-minute recess.

James Earl Ray is serving a 99-year sentence in a Tennessee penitentiary after first pleading guilty to the King murder on April 4, 1968.

On Thursday, the committee questioned Jerry Ray about whether he may have helped finance James Earl Ray's stalking of King before the assassination in Memphis, Tenn., April 4, 1968, and flight to Europe after the killing.

Speiser said the committee believes it has evidence that both John and Jerry took part in the unsolved \$27,000 bank holdup in Alton, Ill., in July 1967, and shared the loot with James Earl Ray.

"I didn't rob that bank," Jerry testified. "I have no knowledge of who robbed it. I just want to make that clear. There's no way possible I could have robbed that bank."

Asked if John or James Earl Ray took part, Jerry Ray said: "No way. I wouldn't know. I was working."

John Ray was released from the federal penitentiary at Marion, Ill., last August and sent to a St. Louis "halfway house" pending parole after serving 7 years of an 18-year sentence for a 1971 bank robbery in St. Peter, Mo.

He was paroled Sept. 18 and has since worked with an airport limousine service in St. Louis, according to federal prison records.